DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 285 127 CS 008 875

AUTHOR Carrasquillo, Angela; And Others
TITLE Perceived Remedial English Reading Class Benefits of Community College Students.
PUB DATE [86]
NOTE 14p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; Compensatory Education; *Reading Attitudes; *Reading Difficulties; Reading Research; Remedial Instruction; *Remedial Reading; *Student Attitudes; Student Characteristics; Two Year Colleges; *Two Year College Students
IDENTIFIERS *Reading Motivation

ABSTRACT

A study surveyed first-year community college students enrolled in remedial English reading, to determine the perceived benefits of a remedial reading class. The study was specifically designed (1) to obtain a profile of the student population, (2) to identify students' reasons for taking remedial reading, and (3) to identify the relationship of remedial reading to students' college or academic careers. Respondents, 87 randomly selected remedial reading students in a New York City community college, answered a biographical and self-evaluating questionnaire that also requested a paragraph about the relationship of remedial reading to their future college plans. Results indicated that the typical first year community college student in a remedial reading course was slightly more likely to be a woman than a man, and that the women were slightly older than the men. While English was the native language of the majority of the students, 54% were foreign born. They were deficient in language, reading, and writing skills. To be admitted to college as a regular student and to get a higher paying job were identified by a high percentage of the respondents as reasons for taking remedial reading, but students did not see the development of better reading strategies as a goal of the course. Findings suggest that the role of the remedial reading instructor should be reevaluated to see if the present role matches the expectations characteristic of the student population being served. (Tables of data are included, and references are attached.) (NKA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

ED285127

Perceived Remedial English Reading Class Benefits of Community College Students

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Angela Carrasquillo

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Angela Carrasquillo
Catherine Biggins
JoAnn Sainz

Carrasquillo is a professor of reading education and TESOL at Fordham University in New York City.
Biggins is an adjunct reading professor at Manhattan Community College, New York City.
Sainz is a professor of Spanish at William Patterson College at New Jersey.

CS 008 875

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Perceived Remedial English Reading Class Benefits of Community College Students

Abstract

This article surveyed perceived remedial English class benefits of community college students. The survey was conducted from a randomized population of students enrolled in a remedial class to: 1) obtain a profile of the student population 2). identify reasons for taking remedial reading 3) identify the relationship of remedial reading to college and academic career.

The study reveals that students participating in remedial reading courses come from different countries and educational backgrounds. A high percentage of the respondents expressed that the main reason in taking remedial reading was to become a regular college student. These findings suggests that the role of remedial courses needs to be re-defined to find ways to motivate and increase the students self concept to enable them to do college work and complete a degree program.

PERCEIVED REMEDIAL ENGLISH READING CLASS BENEFITS OF COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS

This study came as a result of one of the investigator's observations in her remedial English reading class. Teaching a group of New york City community college students in the summer, she asked them what type of help they thought this course would give them beyond fulfilling the academic requirements set by the college. To the professor's surprise, students were mute since they never thought in seeing other benefits to the remedial reading class. The idea of a survey encompassing a large population to confirm her observation and to identify motivational and academic strategies to better serve community college students was planned and carried out.

The Community College Student

Colleges have been attempting to cope with the problem of poorly prepared students through what has come to be known as "the open door policy". This policy is a reality in the community colleges which provide opportunities to enable students, regardless of level of achievement, ethnic group or age, to receive the best educatioh possible. The community colleges offer opportunities to an adult who wants to take courses on a part time basis, the dropout who wants another chance, the adult who wants to take special interest courses, the academic transferee who expects to continue his education in a four-year institution and the minority student who has the opportunity for a low cost or free post-secondary education.

The adoption of the "open admission policy" in the City University of New York (CUNY) in 1970 resulted in an unprecedented institutional growth spurt. CUNY was faced with large numbers of students in need of instruction in basic skills. Each college of the university had to develop testing programs to determine placement and to diagnose individual student needs; each has been faced with the necessity of creating larger programs in reading, writing, mathematics, English and English as a second language.

Today, CUNY still offers a large number of remedial programs. The student population reflects a variety of ethnic, language and academic backgrounds. The students enrolled in the community college are, by and large from low-income groups and often arrive at the university with insufficient preparation for college level work. The needs of these students have force CUNY community colleges to create programs to meet

their educational needs. The remedial English reading course is one of the many academic strategies intended to help the poorly-prepared college student.

The College Remedial Reading Program

Remedial reading courses have become an integral part of the academic program in universities and colleges around the Unites States. Due to the proliferation of open admission policies at many colleges and universities the area of instruction which has perhaps grown and changed more than most has been the remediation programs now offered at the college level. In many community colleges, students are placed in a remedial or developmental program based on their entrance examination scores or on the grades they received in high school. Other colleges have their own assessment instruments to measure the students' reading ability to do college work. In many colleges, the remedial English reading course is required of some students before they can enroll in regular classes. Once the students have been screened, they are placed in special programs which are designed to improve their reading skills and develop their ability to compete with the reading load placed upon them.

The objective of most college reading programs is to develop an independent learner. The most significant aspect of a remedial program is the attention to the needs of individual and small groups. In other words, remedial instruction is individual instruction for individual needs. This individualized reading focus involves counseling skills in self concept, and an increased sense of academic achievement. Schelmezer and Brozo (1982) state that independent learning is positively related to achievement and persistence in a course of study, and that the students attitude toward school is related to achievement. It is not sufficient to teach the reading skills, but time must also be allotted to include sessions where the student can perceive the academic need and the future benefit of being a good reader. The underlying philosophy of a remedial program should be to afford the student large doses of success to change their self concept from one of failure to one of success in seeing the academic advantages of being a good reader.

To survive in college, students must keep tenaciously to their reading materials and to adjust to a variety of reading and study conditions. Hayes and Diehl (1982) state that students must "manage time restrictions, lenghty texts, linguistic complexities, novel and frequently extraneous information, and conceptual difficulties"(p.658). Students need strategies to be able to comply with the demands of college materials. As

Shaking (1978) says the students play the central role in learning from texts. Students need strategies of how to read full-length chapters from textbooks, novels, lab manuals, history books and scientific articles. When students see that the reading program is making a change in their reading habits and in their interpretation of threading materials of the courses, they will be able to identify the academic benefits of the program.

Methodology

The questionnaire was identified as the instrument to sample individual responses of community college students on the perceived benefits of remedial reading. The survey study was conducted in one of the New York City community colleges in the summer of 1986. The sample was taken from a population of 300 students enrolled in remedial English reading from which a randomized selection of 87 students was chosen to participate in the study. These were first year students that were enrolled in a remedial reading class.

The questionnaire consisted of twenty questions of a biographical and self-evaluating nature. It also included an open ended question asking students to write a paragraph to identify the relationship of the remedial reading courses to their academic and college career. The questionnaire was divided in three parts:

Section 1- Biographic Data: Questions 1-10 were compiled to obtain a profile of the current student population. Questions 11-12 were to list the number of reading courses previously taken.

Section 2- Identification of reasons (listing them from most to least important) for taking remedial English reading courses.

Section 3- Identification of future role of remedial reading courses in college career. Students were asked to write a paragraph to identify how remedial English reading courses would help their college and academic career.

Once the data was collected, they were placed on tabulation sheets and read into the computer. This article will use the frequency data for the student population and those tables which show results sorted according to the students remedial English reading perceptions.

Results

Profile of the Students' Population

This information primarily surveyed the population distribution according to student status, native language and country, length of time in the United states, whether students graduated from high school or outside the United States, and type of high school diploma received. Specific personal description of the sample were difficult to compile due to the wide diversity of the population. Judging from the 87 respondents, the typical first year community college student is equally likely to be a man or a woman(60% women, 40% men) However, men and women differed in age, with men somewhat younger than women.

The summary of the biographical information revealed that students participating in remedial reading courses come from different countries and educational backgrounds. The numbers and distributions are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Distribution of Population According to Country, Language and Educational Background

Table 1

	N	%
Full time	79	91
Part time	8	9
English is native language	65	75
English is second language	22	25
Born in U.S.A.	40	46
Born in other country	47	54
Graduate from H.S. in U.S.A.	57	66
Graduated from H.S. outside U.S.A.	19	33
Has a regular H.S. diploma	73	84
Ha a G.E.D. diploma	14	16
English is used at home regularly	60	69

N = 87

The majority of the students identify English as their native language (75%) and hold regular high school diplomas from the United States. These are not linguistically different students, but academically (in language, reading and writing) deficient individuals. These were full-time enrolled students of whom a high percentage graduated from a United States high school (66%). The literature tends to agree with the demographic findings of the study that there are certain common characteristics of community college students. As a group, they 1) comprise a cross section of the general population found in community colleges 2) represent a wide spectrum of ethnic and language background 3) often need some form of remedial assistance.

Reasons for Participating in Remedial Reading Courses

Students were asked to list from 1(the most important) to 5 (the least important) the reasons for taking remedial reading courses. Table 2 indicates the frequencies of their responses:

Table 2
Distribution of Reasons for Enrolling in Remedial English Courses

	N	%
Required to be admitted as a regular college student	79	91
Get higher paying job	45	51
Go into international business or job	31	36
Read other college reading material in English	30	34
Help family and friends with English material	17	20
Get along with English speaking friends	14	16
Be able to finish the baccalaureate degree	8	9
Read about English literature, language or culture	6	7

N = 87

Table 2 shows that a high percentage of the respondents (91%) expressed that the main reason for taking the remedial reading class was because it was a prerequisite to admittance to regular college courses. In many community colleges, students are placed in a remedial or developmental program based on their entrance examination scores or on the grade they received in high school. These compensatory courses are

designated to bring students to a performance level in which they can participate in a college program. It seems that students have the desire to be college students, but are not aware of the academic benefits of remedial reading classes.

Concerning the use of relevant reading content to prepare them for courses leading their baccalaureate, only 9% of the respondents chose this item. It is of interest to note that, although the reading course would help them to read college reading material in English only 34% marked this item. Also, the other academic reasons (to get along with English-speaking friends, to read about English literature, and to help family with English) were not chosen by the majority of the respondents. However, the item about getting a higher paying job was chosen by 51% of the respondents. To be admitted as a regular student and to get a higher paying job were rated very important by a high percentage of the respondents. By comparison, the remaining reasons do not seem particularly highly rated.

Relationship Between Remedial Reading and Future College Career

The last section of the questionnaire asked the respondents to answer the following question: How do you think remedial English reading courses will help you in your college career? The purpose of the question was to determine the type of relationship respondents perceived between the remedial reading course and their college career. Respondents' answers are described in Table 3.

Table 3

Distribution of the Population According to the Relationship between Remedial Reading Course and College Career

	N	%
Be admitted as a regular college student	70	80
Get a good job	39	45
Speak with American peers	29	33
Develop better writing skills	19	21
Develop better reading skills	15	17
Learn to read	12	14
It will not help	5	6

N = 87

Community college students identified the main benefit of the remedial reading course as being able to be admitted as regular college students. Again, responses were consistent in expressing that the reading English remedial course would help them in their college careers by providing them the opportunity to be admitted as regular college students. A very low percentage of respondents identified the acquisition of basic skills such as reading and writing as the important factor for being able to take and master the required course work for the completion of the baccalaureate degree. Perhaps, students were not aware of their basic skills deficiencies and the academic benefits of remedial courses. A very low percentage of the respondents chose the items relating to improving their reading and writing skills.

Factors Contributing to Limited Perceptions of Benefits of Reading Remedial

A significant number of the sample valued very highly being a a regular college student. What does being a "regular college student" mean? It is related to the students self perception of how the college would serve them to accomplish their goal of upward mobility. By getting and passing through the college the students perceive that they will get a better job and improve financially and socially. But, they did not see the most immediate benefits in terms of improving their basic literacy skills. There are several factors to justify the students answers related to the benefits of remedial reading courses. Language mastery, motivation, low self concept,and development of thinking skills are some of these factors.

Mastery of Literacy Skills

A representative number of college students participating in English remedial courses are students for whom English is their native language, and who received a high school diploma from a United States high school. These findings tend to suggest the need to conduct an evaluation of how developmental and remedial reading is taught at the high school level. According to Chall (1984) standardized test scores seem to show gains during the decade in the early grades, but these gains seem to taper off in the middle and upper grades, and they seem to decline during the high school years. These findings suggest that in high school English courses content and skills need to emphasize more language development, remedial, developmental, and enrichment of reading rather than only literature and grammar.

Motivation: Attitudes Toward Reading Reading

The teaching of reading at the college level has three functions: to stimulate , to inform and to guide students. The emphasis should be packed upon stimulation and guidance rather than upon the process of providing information about reading which the student may feel is quite unrelated to his work in college. As Ahrendt (1975) says "students do not hunger and thirst for information, concerning how to read until they understand that the reading skills are related to their success in college". The remedial courses would provide students with the necessary reinforcements to make each learning experience sufficiently satisfying to stimulate students to come back and try again.

The end result of reading instruction at the college level should be the acquisition of attitudes toward reading. But, it is not accomplished solely by listening to lectures or by filling blanks in exercise books. Class practices should help these students to use the most effective strategies for getting a message from the print. It is through this course that the reader can identify the motive in advancing in reading, to recognize their reading strengths and weaknesses and to be able to deal with these strengths and weaknesses, to develop an attitude of curiosity about the printed world, and play with techniques for dealing with print. Students should be aware that there are strategies that successful readers use.

Brown and Santos (1984) referred to good readers as those students who have some awareness and control over the cognitive activities in which they are engaged during reading. They mentioned the techniques that fluent readers use: 1) Establishing a purpose for reading 2) selecting appropriate reading strategies depending on the text 3) Monitoring their activities to determine whether comprehension is occurring 4) Developing positive attitudes toward reading (p.1-2). Strategies are essential in the comprehension of reading material and readers should be provided with opportunities to apply different strategies for different purposes. Brown and Santos (1984) also mentioned that students attitudes toward reading can influence their achievement and can often alleviate feelings of frustration and failure.

The simplest answers of the participants of this study toward the benefits of remedial reading reading warrant several recommendations. First, students should be made aware of the language and reading benefits of their participation in these remedial courses. The main reason for enrollment in a remedial reading course should not be for admission to college only, but to be able to complete the reading course by being able

to read college textbooks and any other printed material through the use of successful reading strategies and by getting satisfaction from reading. In other words, students should see the need to acquire the necessary basic skills to function in the academic world.

Specialized reading instructors (not only English specialists or linguists) are needed to teach language development and reading skills. These specialists should be capable of motivating students not only to pass the course, but to acquire the necessary linguistic, reading and writing skills to perform college work.

Self Concept

Many college students have feelings of insecurity about their reading rate, comprehension and retention. What their expectations are in termsof the course being difficult is what they see when they take the course. Introversion and anxiety appear to be characteristic of the poor reader at the college level. In general, students have a self concept of failure, developed through repeated experiences of failure in the educational system. This low self concept does not allow them to read, write, listen, interact nor communicate on a level which will provide them with the skills necessary to complete a program.

Development of Thinking Skills

The chief reading difficulty of college students is not in the basic skills of recognition , but in the thinking skills involved in most reading activities. The reading classroom must present an atmosphere in which students' interests in the subject are captured, retained and built upon. The classroom environment should be highly interactive to engage in realistic content analysis and to develop new ways of thinking in order to make sense of this new information. Meyers (1986) stated that one of the thornier problems in college teaching is figuring out how to help students get some distance from their own values and beliefs so that they can entertain more abstract modes of perception.

Classes should be structured to promote critical thought. One way to increase critical thinking in the classroom is through creating an interactive classroom to generate class discussion. Classroom discussion can be used to: introduce new concepts, to reinforce previously introduced concepts and to analyze and compare theoretical ideas. The remedial class can start by beginning with simple operations, such as summarizing,

recognizing basic issues,identifying key issues and learning to ask appropriate questions. They can then build toward more complex levels, such as recognizing assumptions and criticizing arguments (Meyer, 1986).

The remedial reading class should focus on real problems and issues and draw upon students ' own experiences. Exercises that ask students to analyze problems related to their own immediate experience will increase

their interests to participate in the reading activity and to find a strategy to deal with the thinking activity involved.

Summary

This study presented interesting data on how college students perceived the remedial English class. It is a simplest and narrowed view. The students responses led the authors of this article to make the following final comments. The underlying goal of a remedial college program is to motivate students with academic activities and self instructional and assessment tools to guide them to self-assess the academic benefits of the program. It did not happen with this population, and perhaps is not happening in other remedial classes. The remedial program must be revisited to identify its weaknesses and strengths in terms of students long and short academic benefits. If the program is not fulfilling its goals, changes in focus and content might be needed.

Another benefit of remedial program is to increase the students' self-conceptfrom one of failure to one of success, and to enable them to do college work and complete a degree program. Remedial college professors need formal training in motivational and cognitive strategies to spend classroom time engaging students interests, challenging students thinking process and creating an atmosphere where active reflection and interchange replaces caution and passivity (Mayers,1986). In other words, the role of the reading professor needs to be re-evaluated to see if the present role matches with the characteristics of the students being served.

References

Ahrendt, K. M. (1975). Community college reading programs. Newark: Delaware: International Reading Association.

Brown, L. D. (1984). Promoting literacy in the classroom: From theory to practice. In R. Rodriguez (ED.), Teaching Reading to minority language students. Rosslyn, Virginia: National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, pp. 1-5.

Chall, J. S. (1981). Literacy trends and explanations. American Education. Washington, D. C: United States Department of Education, pp.16-22.

Hayes, D. A. & Diehl, W. (1982). What research on prose comprehension suggests for college skills instruction. Journal of Reading, 25 (7), 656-661.

Meyers, C. (1986). Teaching students to think critically. London: Jossey-Basss Publishers.

Schmelzer,R. & Brozo, W. G. (1982). A skills therapy approach for developmental learning in college. Journal of Reading. 25 (7), 646-655.

Shanklin, N. L. (1978). A cognitive and language-based program for basic college students. Indiana University, Bloomington.